Land Commissioner George Elphinstone Dalrymple opened up the Herbert River Valley to European settlement and Maurice Geoffrey O'Connell and William McDowell planted the first sugar cane.

George Elphinstone Dalrymple and sugar cane growing begins

It may have been Land Commissioner George Elphinstone Dalrymple who reported to the Colonial Government that the rich alluvial flats of the breathtaking valley he viewed, after thrashing and macheting his way through the undergrowth over the Seaview Range in 1864, were ***"the best suited for the growth of sugar, cotton and coffee in Queensland,"*** but it was Maurice Geoffrey O'Connell and William McDowell who were the first Europeans to attempt the gamble of the unknown: growing sugar cane in the Valley. Of them we know nothing more for they had left the Valley by 1870 perhaps defeated by the steamy, tropical climate and the dawn to dusk drudgery and hard work of clearing and planting a new and hostile land. Nevertheless, they had realized Dalrymple's vision that sugar cane could indeed be grown on the rich alluvial flats of the Vale of Herbert.

George Elphinstone Dalrymple, "The New Settlement at Rockingham Bay". *The Sydney Morning Herald,* Saturday 13 August 1864, p.p.5-6.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel we see O'Connell, or perhaps it is McDowell, ploughing the rich virgin soil aided by his faithful plodding horses and the reliable mouldboard plough. Behind him the mighty Herbert River wends its way through stands of tall young cane.

People from the islands of Melanesia were recruited as indentured labour to toil on the sugar plantations of the Herbert River Valley. Those indentured labourers were known as Kanakas.

Melanesian Islanders as indentured labour

Our first sugar planters, Maurice Geoffrey O'Connell and William McDowell proved that sugar was not going to be successfully grown in the Herbert River Valley by the hands of Europeans alone. And so it was that men and women from the islands of Melanesia were brought on recruiting ships to toil on the canefields of the Herbert River Valley. Originating from Vanuatu, New Caledonia, the Solomon and Louisiades (PNG) Islands. Many came, not involuntarily, but others were enticed or kidnapped. The word "blackbirding" came to be used for that enticement and kidnapping, and the word 'Kanaka' for these indentured workers themselves.

"We wish to keep our own superior race in its proper sphere, and look with hearty and commendable aversion on the idea that any white man should be bound down to labour which (although there is no question of his ability to do it for a time) must eventually destroy his own constitution, and enfeeble his progeny.

The Polynesian, on the other hand….. is physically qualified by long hereditary to continue at such labour without injury; and under the regulated conditions of plantation work (provided he is well fed, clothed and housed, and gently dealt with on his arrival from the islands) improves to an extent almost inconceivable to those unaccustomed to witness his rapid evolution. In a word, the Polynesian is at home where his white superior is a fish out of water."

JOHN LELY, Secretary Herbert River Farmers' League, also of the Halifax Planters' Club. Brisbane, 14th June" "Black and White." *The Brisbane Courier*, Tuesday 15 June 1897, p.7.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel we see a blackbird representing the blackbirding or kidnapping of the Islanders. The blackbird perches on a tree whose arm like branch entice the Islanders with promises of fortunes to be made. On the other side of the panel palm trees line the island shore, waves gently roll in as the recruitment boats draw away. An Islander woman, eyes downcast, her hair windswept, stands forlornly as the ships sail into the distance taking her menfolk from everything they know and love to an unknown land, many never to return. The rolling waves represent the tumultuous journey and experiences awaiting them in that land. The fiercely glowing sun represents the promise of the riches to be had and the sunrise of an era of colonial advancement into the tropical north. The stars on the tree signify the government legislation that permitted the indenture of Melanesian people. On the sail of the boat is pictured a nautilus shell, a valued currency of the Islanders. The new growth on the tree branches indicates the advancement of the sugar cane industry that took place as a result of the back-breaking labours of the indentured labour.

Europeans leased their land to Chinese people many of whom became some of the first small sugar cane farmers. Others ran market gardens and managed stores, and worked in the mills and in the plantation houses as staff or cooks.

Chinese workers clear the land

It wasn't only the South Sea Islanders who helped realize the intentions of the Colonial Government to exploit the tropical north. Finding the land hard to tame the Europeans leased it to Chinese people who, not permitted to own land in their own right, would clear the land of standing timber and plant and cultivate a first crop, becoming some of the first small sugar cane farmers. The Europeans acknowledged the Chinese people's ability to do it effectively but were not necessarily happy about this arrangement:

"Great difficulty is, however, experienced in getting sufficient labour to carry on field work, and things look very bad for the future. Many of the planters and small farmers are driven to enter into contracts with Chinamen to clear land, plant cane, and cultivate the crop at so much per acre.
This state of things is much to be deprecated, as eventually the whole cultivation of the district will pass into the hands of the Celestials…"

But in truth it was on the back of these Chinese peoples that European settlement prospered, for not only did they clear the land but ran market gardens and managed stores, and worked in the mills and in the plantation houses as staff or cooks and for small farmers who were initially not allowed to employ Kanaka labour.

Sir Alfred Cowley, "Ingham Notes." *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 27th October 1884, p.34 in L.H.A.C. 900022:B.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

This panel depicts a Chinese man felling a tree. Behind him stretch acres of paddocks in various stages of cultivation, from fallow, to planted cane, to cane ready for harvest. This patchwork carving of land depicts the invasion and taking over of the traditional lands of the Indigenous people by the Europeans. The colours and linear arrangement of the tiles at the top of the panel draw their inspiration from Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*, an evocation of terror. The flow of crimson tiles represents the bloodshed and displacement that resulted from the invasion. At the base of the scene runs the Rainbow Serpent whose three different colorations represent the three Indigenous groups: Nywaigi, Warrgamay and Bandjin, who called the Herbert River Valley their homelands. The mighty Herbert River appears again in this panel and is a constant thread in the story represented by the panels.

The clearing of land for timber, cattle grazing and the growing of crops meant that the natural habitats and hunting grounds of the Aboriginal people were taken from them with devastating effects not only on their traditional lifestyle but also on the native plants and animals.

The displacement of the Aboriginal people

In the Herbert River Valley the Nywaigi, Warrgamay and Bandjin Aboriginal people maintained a delicate balance with their environment. The clearing of land for timber, cattle grazing and the growing of crops meant that their natural habitats and hunting grounds were taken from them with devastating effects on the native plants and animals. From then on they were forced to live on the margins of society and economic activity. However they were not without a few European protectors like James Cassady, the owner of Mungalla Station at the heartland of Nywaigi lands. He wrote of the terrible situation as he saw it:

"In this portion of the Kennedy the white man up to the present has had little cause to complain, but it is not so with the black; for the last twelve months both men and women have been disappearing one by one, and sometimes in larger numbers, by the aid of powder and ball. And what is the crime? It may be taking a few sweet potatoes or a few cobs of corn.
To-day I hear of a massacre of four blacks, amongst them a woman, a boy of about eight years, and a girl of about twelve years of age."

Letter written by James Cassady:"The poor black." *The Queenslander*, Saturday 21 April 1877, p.18.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In the second scene of this panel we see an Indigenous Aboriginal family group, at one with the land on which they lived. Fish from the river and animals from the land sustained them as did the stories of their Dreaming and their traditions. The man stands proudly and tall, holding a shield painted in the traditional manner. The Herbert River continues on its turbulent course on the bottom of this panel. The Indigenous loss of land and life is symbolized by the abrupt end of the Rainbow Serpent and the screaming crimson sky.

Starting with Gairloch Mill in 1872 six plantation mills were established with only Victoria and Macknade Mills surviving to this day. The others were Bemerside, Hamleigh, and Ripple Creek. A short plantation era ended when small farmers negotiated an agreement with the dominant miller, the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR), to supply cane for crushing at Victoria Mill. The town of Ingham is named after William Bairstow Ingham, a plantation owner.

The first plantations and mills

The way of life of the Indigenous peoples was very different to that of the sugar cane planters who selected the land with speculative greed. In the early 1870s several plantations were established in quick and optimistic succession, starting with Gairloch in 1872. In all, six mills would be established with the most lasting being the Macknade and Victoria plantations. Though a mill never came to be built on Ings Plantation, it has enduring significance because it was owned by William Bairstow Ingham after whom the township of Ingham was named. Ingham was forced to abandon his plantation when sugar prices fell and cane crops were wiped out by disease.

Visitors to the Valley, such as the one quoted here, remarked on the extent of the cleared land and the industry of the plantations: ***"In the distance can be seen the tall chimneys of the Gairloch, Victoria and Hamleigh sugar mills, the surrounding country being nearly all quite level, and almost destitute of timber. Victoria plantation, the property of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, has only commenced operations this year, but nevertheless promises to outstrip some of its older competitors. It is on the banks of Palm Creek, about three miles from Ingham, and has a large area under cultivation, which is rapidly being increased. Trams are to be seen running in all directions conveying the cane to the mill, and the sugar from the mill to the wharf. Hamleigh also distant about three miles from Ingham, in an opposite direction to Victoria, is well worth a visit. The labour employed on these plantations is principally Kanakas and Chinamen, though there are a large number of whites engaged in different capacities. The other plantations are Gairloch and Macknade, lower down on the Herbert…"***

"A TRIP TO THE LOWER HERBERT BY J.E.P." *The Brisbane Courier*, Thursday February 7 1884, p.6.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this portion of the panel we see Kanakas hard at work cutting and loading cane. The six mills billow smoke into a starry sky. This panel draws its inspiration from Van Gogh's painting *Starry Night*, for the planters initially had stars in their eyes, riding on a wave of prosperity that would soon come to an abrupt end, allowing the small grower to take his place in the industry. The seven circular stars in the sky represent the seven year agreement the small growers made with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) that enabled them to grow cane and supply it to the mills for crushing.

With a sugar industry came, unfortunately, introduced pests, amongst them the Mynah bird first released to control locusts and cane beetles.

Hamleigh Plantation Mill and the Mynah bird

Hamleigh Plantation was one of the first places that the Mynah birds from India were introduced and released in North Queensland. The Common Mynah was initially released in Australia in 1862 to combat pests in Melbourne market gardens. It was then brought to Queensland in 1883 and released at Hamleigh in order to help control insects in the cane fields, namely locusts and cane beetles. These insects were, and can be even today, a real scourge. In 1884 neither Victoria Mill nor Hamleigh Mill crushed sugar cane, because their crops had been demolished by a locust plague. Today the Mynah bird itself is considered a pest, but formerly they were so highly valued that requests were made by sugar industry representatives to give the bird protected status:

"Mr. G. H. Pritchard, secretary to the A.S.P.A., writes that he has, at the request of the Herbert River Farmers' League, succeeded in getting the Government to place the Mynah Bird on the list of birds totally protected District No.2 (Northern and Central) under the provisions of the Native Birds Protection Acts. The Mynah Bird is very plentiful on the Herbert, where it is highly valued…"

"The Mynah Bird." *The Northern Herald*, Friday 5 November 1915, p.9.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel we observe that smoke only billows from the two Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) smoke stacks. The other plantation mills have ceased operations and their stacks stand silent. Red tiles, arranged graph-like, represent a stock market drop in sugar prices. The brown tiles signify the so-called 'rust' disease that decimated the crops and in the struggling stools of cane are cane beetles and locusts which it was hoped would be controlled by the Mynah bird. The Mynah bird standing on the Hamleigh chimney stack, as if standing on a fence post, is portrayed many times its actual size indicative of the ability of introduced species to multiply and dominate the food chain. The smoke flows in the direction of the future for together small farmers and CSR carried the cane sugar industry successfully into a new century.

A short lived plantation era in the Herbert River Valley was replaced by small farmers growing cane and supplying it to a central mill for crushing.

Colonial Sugar Refining Company (CSR) and small farmers

Here it can be seen that momentous change is afoot in the Herbert River Valley. Financial crisis was already facing the planters as early as 1875 and so to ease their situation they leased portions of their blocks to potential small growers. Land was not at first available to the small grower because it had been taken up by wealthy and speculative planters who had no interest in making a permanent home in the Valley. Within 12 years the foundations of their wealth and pretensions proved to be no more than window dressing in a candy shop and the planters began to pack up what they could salvage and head back down the Herbert River to catch a steamer southwards.

The Colonial Sugar Refining Company (C.S.R.) had already set a precedent in the Clarence and Tweed Rivers of N.S.W. where their mills were crushing cane grown by small growers. So when the company set up business in the Valley the small holders saw an opportunity and struck an agreement that gave impetus to the small grower movement and secured the future of sugar cane in the Valley:

"The 1885 season was looked forward to with great interest by the small planters. Sometime before the commencement of the crushing they made an agreement with the company to cut their own cane on the co-operative system; they undertook to cut and deliver on the main line a minimum of 60 tons per day and shift from farm to farm at the direction of the Cane Inspector. The company was to provide all working material, except cane knives, payment to be 3/- per ton of cane. The farmers were pleased by this arrangement because each individual farmer would be boss in his own field while his cane was being cut. They engaged Chinamen as cane-cutters; kanakas were at that time not available to farmers."

"Early History" (By an Old Settler). *Herbert River Express*, February 25th 1933.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel we see the small farmer and his family hard at work planting the cane of a future crop. The stand of tall, straight cane behind them testifies to their hopes for a prosperous future. The farmer's simple cottage is a sharp contrast to the planters' pretentious dwellings. The red door signifies the powerful position the small farmer assumed in the industry, lasting to the present day. The bullocks are hauling logs from the land cleared to make way for sugar cane. They are retreating towards the earlier panels of the mosaic because as the land is cleared, the past landscape disappears, and with it, the lifestyle of its Indigenous inhabitants.

The threatened end to the importation of Kanaka labour led to a need to find an alternative labour source. As a result indentured labourers from Europe were brought to North Queensland, starting with the first large group of Italians arriving on the *Jumna* in 1891.

The *Jumna* and the first Italian immigrants

The colourful flags of many nations and a ship ploughing its way through the oceans blue tell us that the Herbert River Valley has become home to people from every corner of the globe. It is the migration of Italians to the Valley however that has had a most significant and ongoing influence. While the small farmer managed to successfully grow sugar because he could rely on his own back breaking work and that of other family members, including children, he still depended on contract workers for the harvest season. The passing of legislation by Premier Samuel Griffith's government in 1885 to cease the importation of Kanaka labour to the cane fields was accompanied by an offer of Government assistance to find an alternative source of labour for that heavy field work. This resulted in the recruitment of indentured labourers from Europe, among them Italians. Significant numbers of Italian immigrants henceforth came to North Queensland in three distinct waves. The first large group to arrive was on the *Jumna* in 1891.

"Embarkation took place on the afternoon of the 24th, and the Jumna proceeded to sea at 5p.m.....and arrived at Thursday Island on the 27th at 9a.m. After a careful inspection of all on board by Dr Salter pratique was granted. She left Thursday Island at 6 a.m.on 28th November, called at Cooktown and Cairns, and arrived in Cleveland Bay at 8.45 p.m. on 1 December 1891.

…the officers of the ship spoke in high terms of the behaviour of the Italians "throughout the passage", the captain stated that "The Italians proved themselves to be civil, obedient, and anxious to conform to the rules laid down for their safety and comfort". …

Good order and harmony prevailed amongst the Italians and singing was regularly indulged in each evening."

F. Galassi, *Sotto La Croce del Sud. Under the Southern Cross*, Department of History and Politics, James Cook University, Townsville, 1991, p.p.64-66.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel the ship, the *Jumna*, is framed by an arch, reminiscent of Mediterranean architecture. The top of the arch disassembles towards the former panel representing the longing, backwards looks of those on board the *Jumna* as it drew away from the familiar shore into the unknown. In the same way the flags, representing the many nations from which immigrants to the Herbert River Valley have come, disassemble but this time towards the future and the tropical Valley which will become their new home. The sun represents a compass guiding the immigrants to new lands. The map of Italy on the sail of the *Jumna* signifies the home they are leaving with heavy, but hopeful hearts.

As the Italian immigrants travelling on the *Jumna* docked on Queensland shores, other ships were pulling away taking the Kanakas back to their islands. With the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 the importation of Kanaka labour ceased and the process for their forcible removal was put in train.

The deportation of the 'Kanakas'

At the height of their importation, South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) outnumbered the European population of the Herbert River Valley substantially. For instance, in 1886 an estimated 2,000 Kanakas were working in the cane fields while only 500 Europeans were living here. Yet despite this numerical supremacy they were controlled in such a way to keep them living outside of what was considered to be mainstream society. They were not envisaged to become long-term residents and were generally demonized. They were regarded as being of an inferior race and to be undermining the working conditions of white workers. The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 decreed that the importation of South Sea Islanders would be proportionally reduced until March 31 1904 when the importation would cease altogether. All not exempt by December 31 1906 would be deported. Any who had arrived before December 13 1879 were allowed to remain in Australia. Not all Europeans considered this action warranted or just:

"I cannot but feel that much injustice was done when the Kanakas were deported in the name of White Australia. They were brought over solely for the benefit of the Queensland sugar industry and when their time was up numbers of them were allowed to settle down, acquire land and adopt European food and customs without any idea that they would ever be compelled to go. Then, all of a sudden the command was given that all who had not been 20 years in the country or exempted for one or two causes, must return to their own island – where in many instances they had been forgotten, and in some cases were actually killed as intruders."

Bishop Gilbert White, Anglican Bishop of Carpentaria referring to 'The Aliens Restriction Act' as quoted in Geoff Burrows and Clive Morton, *The Canecutters*, Melbourne, 1986, p.32.

The cook shared in the earnings of the cane cutting gang and could be either male or female.The immigrant gangs found the "British" diet usually served up by the barracks' cook, and the limited range of food items available on store shelves very different to that of their homelands.

The barracks cook

Canecutters could not do the hard work of cane cutting unless they were properly fed. As the following poem indicates, the temperament of the cook and the quality of the food determined a good season as much as the condition of the cane or the gang's relationship with the farmer did:

THE CANECUTTER'S LAMENT

How we suffered grief and pain
Up in the Isis (or …On the banks of the Herbert River….)
We sweated blood, we were black as sin
For the ganger, he drove the spur right in

The first six weeks, so help me Mike
We lived on cheese and half boiled rice,
Doughy bread and cats-meat stew,
And corn beef that the flies had blew.

The Chinese cook with his cross-eyed look
Filled our guts with his corn-beef hashes,
Damned our souls with his halfbaked rolls
That'd poison snakes with their greasy ashes.

The cane was bad, the cutters was mad,
The cook had a hob-nailed liver,
And never again will I cut cane
On the banks of the Isis (Herbert) River.

Now I'm leaving this lousy place,
I'll cut no more for this hungry bugger,
He can stand in the mud that's red as blood
And cut his own blasted sugar.

A traditional song as recorded by Bill Scott. *Complete Book of Australian Folk Lore*, Summit Books, Sydney, 1976. p.124.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel the gang is about to down cane knives for 'smoko' as the female cook has carried the 'smoko' provisions, which she has prepared back in the barracks kitchen, down to the paddock. Tea was brought to the paddock in either an aluminium teapot or in a billy. One of the cane cutters carries a canvas water bag which would have been filled at dawn with fresh rain water from the barrack's rain water tank before the gang set off for the paddock. The rake of cut cane lies on the ground ready for the hard task of loading in the afternoon.

Bill Scott noted: When I was cutting cane and working on mill locos around Innisfail in 1947, there was a couplet often recited by blokes in public bars that went: "Never again will I cut cane On the banks of the Johnstone River." I had a fair idea that there must be a song or poem around this, for it was extant throughout the cane-growing areas, only the name of the river being changed to suit local conditions."

Once the Herbert River was the life blood of the district. Paddle steamers and punts travelled up and down from the ports at the mouth, first Dungeness and then Port Lucinda to the furthest mill up river. Each mill had a wharf from which cut cane or sugar bags could be transferred to the waiting vessels. Silting of the river resulting from deforestation and intensive farming meant that river traffic ceased and steam trains took over.

CSR's 2 foot gauge tramway was used for not only the transport of harvested cane, but bagged sugar, passengers and goods. The opening of the railway line to Lucinda was the death knell for the Herbert River as a transport system.

A railway line to Lucinda Point

Lucinda was first opened to European settlement in 1895. Mr. John Lely, a member of both the Divisional Board (Council) and the Herbert River Farmers' League, suggested a railway line to Lucinda Point because it had been identified as the most feasible location for a port given the ongoing problems with Dungeness. Mr. Lely thought that the Divisional Board should apply to the Government for a loan to construct a tramline to connect Lucinda Point with Ingham but meanwhile C.S.R. proposed that it would extend its two foot gauge tramway (which already carried not only cane but passengers and goods between Halifax, the Victoria Plantation and Ingham) to Lucinda.

"TRAM LINE AT INGHAM C.S.R. COMPANY'S EXTENSION. DIVISIONAL BOARD ACTION.

(BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.) (FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)

In June, 1891, Mr. A. S. Cowley (the present Speaker of the Legislative Assembly) wrote to the Hinchinbrook Divisional Board stating the he had visited Sydney to interview Mr. Knox, the manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, on the subject of extending the tramway to Lucinda Point. Subsequently he met Mr. Farquhar, an officer of the company, on the Herbert, and the result was that a basis for agreement was made. The company, Mr. Cowley stated, were prepared to extend their line from the existing terminus near Ingham to the receiving store, East Ingham, and from Halifax, or a point below Halifax, to Lucinda Point, and run trains at least three days per week throughout the year, and carry all goods to and from Ingham and Halifax, not exceeding 2,000 tons per annum, for and on behalf of your board, for the sum of £300 per annum, payable half-yearly, and all goods in excess of 2,000 tons at the rate of 6s. per ton, and all passengers free, …"

The Brisbane Courier, Tuesday 30 July 1895, p.5.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

Past and future collide in this panel. In the background can be seen a paddle steamer carrying the bagged sugar and punts loaded with cut cane as was done before the Herbert River became intrafficable. A cane train steams along a two foot gauge railway line drawing a load of bagged sugar destined for Port Lucinda where it will be loaded onto waiting sugar lighters. Navvies are hard at work constructing the tram line. In the foreground is a gantry used to load the cut cane on to a sugar truck. These bush gantries once dotted the district.

On the Herbert River, despite the pastoralists, the sugar planters and the speculators holding most of the land, there were small selectors who dared to dream. They were convinced of their ability to work and thrive in the tropics. They wanted to make a permanent home in the valley and were determined to grow cane. They formed associations, first the Herbert River Farmers' Association (HRFA) and then the Herbert River Farmers' League (HRFL). The HRFA was claimed to be the first such association in Queensland, that is, one that originated to represent small growers' interests rather than those of the larger planters. They met on moonlit nights "to work for and promote the interests of the farming industry in general and the welfare and progress of the Herbert River district in particular."

The Herbert River Farmers' Association

Two small landholders, August Anderssen and John Alm, were deputised to approach an officer of the C.S.R. Company with a proposal that the smaller landholders of the Valley grow sugar cane for supply to the new mill, Victoria Mill. It was suggested that these landholders form an association through which they could communicate their proposal to the C.S.R. General Manager. A meeting was called at August Anderssen's farm, so that Anderssen and Alm could report back what had transpired at their meeting with the C.S.R. officer. Six settlers attended the meeting: Harald Hoffensetz, August Anderssen, A.W. Carr, N.C. Rosendahl, John Alm and Francis Herron. It was decided at this meeting to form an association which would be henceforth known as the Herbert River Farmers' Association.

"We are in receipt of a copy of the "objects and rules" of the Herbert River Farmers' Association which has been formed – "(1). To promote the interests of sugar planters and tropical agriculture in all its branches. (2). To secure an adequate and suitable supply of labour. (3). To join with similar associations in protecting the sugar interests against any possible damage resulting through fraud, conspiracy, mis-representation, or political persecution of any kind, and assist in the development of all kinds of tropical agriculture in Northern Queensland."

"Northern Mail News." *The Capricornian*, Saturday 9 May 1885, p.16.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

The moon shines brightly through the open window as members of the Herbert River Farmers' Association (later the Herbert River Farmers' League) meet around a lantern-lit table. Meetings were only possible on the night of a full moon for the moon would light their horses' way along headlands and bush tracks to a neighbour's farm house where they would gather, determined to advance their prospects as small sugar cane growers in the Herbert River Valley.

By the end of the first decade of the new century sugar farming in the Herbert River Valley was in the hands of small farmers who supplied their cane to two CSR central mills, Victoria and Macknade. Kanaka labour had come to an end and the last of the old plantation families had left.

On the horizon were two world wars which would see families lose their next generation of farmers on the killing fields of foreign shores, women take up cane knife and hoe to keep farms afloat and a community turns on itself as those regarded by the Government as aliens were forcibly removed and interned in internment camps far from home and family.

World Wars

WORLD WAR I

The First World War effort depended solely on volunteers but as it became apparent that the war was not going to end quickly and the casualties mounted horrifically, the number of men volunteering fell. The proposal for compulsory military service overseas was defeated in the conscription referendums of 1916 and 1917. The Hinchinbrook Shire Council is on record to have supported conscription. Recruiting campaigns such as the one described here contributed to the enlistment of 243 local men in the Australian Imperial Force, 35 of whom were killed in action:

"The recruiting campaign was inaugurated in Ingham by a public meeting and social on Saturday night. The meeting was the largest ever held in Ingham, the hall being packed and a larger number were unable to gain admission. Mr. F. A. Cassady presided, and included in the audience were a large number from Halifax, who were conveyed to Ingham by a special free train provided by the C.S.R. Co. Recruiting speeches were by Messrs. R. E. Alston, A. E. Allison, T. Harren, E. Blackmore who announced his intention of enlisting and T. C. Kennedy. After the meeting a dance was held."

Eight months later we read of the death of Lieutenant Rowland Alston:

"AUSTRALIANS KILLED - London, Friday
Lieutenant Rowland Alston, of the Field Artillery, of the Herbert River, Queensland, and Captain Keith Forbes Robertson of the Rifle Brigade, a former resident of Melbourne, have been killed in action."

WORLD WAR II

As war approached many local young men joined the Militia, the "C" Company of the 31st Battalion, which became the 31st Battalion A.I.F. once war commenced. The harmony formerly experienced between the residents of the Valley, whether they were Indigenous, of pioneer stock or recent immigrant, was severely challenged by the internment of those identified as enemy aliens. They included Italians, Finns, Germans, Slavs, Japanese, Chinese, Malays, even Swiss, Danes and Spaniards. The internments, evacuations to the south by those driven by fear of invasion, enlistments, recruitment to the Civilian Construction Corps and conscription into the Civilian Alien Corps drained the local population drastically, impacting every aspect of life of the remaining Valley residents. 45 young men never returned to the Valley from the battlefields. Many of those who survived were reluctant to share with their families the horrors they had seen. Dan Sheahan spoke on their behalf, immortalizing their experiences:

"Herbert River Notes." *The Northern Herald*, Friday 21 January 1916, p.54.
"Australians Killed." *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, Saturday 2 September 1916, p.5.
By Dan Sheahan, Poet, *Songs from the Canefields*, 1972.

"Send off to A.I.F. Volunteer"

With saddened hearts we see him go
To join that grim array –
Who holds on Egypt's burning sand
The sullen Hun at bay.

Alas! That we should part with him
To join in War's grim test –
Alas! That we should sacrifice
Our bravest and our best.

Oh, may the Angels be his guard
And danger pass him by –
When bombers boom above him
And shells and bullets fly.

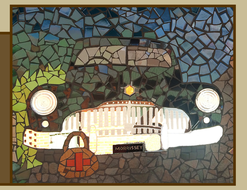
Let us hope in days to come
When war dogs bark no more –
We'll welcome back to Elphinstone
The Spanish Toreador…"

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

A soldier, a kit bag over his shoulder, walks from the ploughed paddock towards a beckoning sun on the horizon mirroring the Rising Sun badge he wears proudly on his slouch hat. His wife stoically picks up the hoe, determined to keep the fields tilled until his return. Crimson poppies are scattered across the battle fields of foreign lands where lie buried those who will never return to the verdant Vale of Herbert. The steely grey tiles represent the artillery of war. Waving above him is the striking navy blue of the Australian flag emblematic of all that the soldier holds dear. At the bottom of the panel the Rainbow Serpent reappears, bleeding into the colours of army camouflage – a tribute to the brave Indigenous soldiers of the Herbert River Valley.

Leptospira are the organisms responsible for Weil's Disease which in 1934 struck down cane cutters at an alarming rate. Dr Gordon Morrissey contributed to the clinical diagnosis of Weil's Disease.

Leptospira are carried by rats. Burning the cane before cutting effectively sterilized the ground and stalks of the leptospira. However this solution was not achieved before the cane cutters staged a strike.



Dr Gordon Morrissey and Weil's Disease

The summer of 1933, and the year following, brought unusually heavy wet seasons and as a result grass and undergrowth flourished and the town and surrounding farms were invaded by a plague of rats. During the harvesting season cane cutters began to present at the Ingham Hospital with fever. The numbers struck down grew at an alarming rate and some died excruciating deaths. It was clear that something had to be done and quickly. Dr Gordon Morrissey, general practitioner and part-time superintendent of the Ingham District Hospital, took a professional interest in aspects affecting health in the tropics and it was as a result of that interest that he contributed to the clinical diagnosis of Weil's Disease. The organisms responsible for Weil's Disease were leptospira carried by rats. Cane cutters contracted the virus when rats' urine on the ground or on the cane stalks came in contact with skin abrasions when the cane cutter handled the contaminated cane stalks. Clearly a solution would be to burn the cane which would effectively sterilize the ground and stalks.

"Dr G. Morrissey read a paper on Weil's disease. Discussing methods of preventions, Dr Morrissey said that burning of cane, which was a controversial point in sugar areas, had justified itself. The extermination of rats required a tremendous amount of work and much was being done, but he believed that the objective would never be accomplished as rodents swarmed in millions in the cane fields and adjacent country. Dr Morrissey stated as his private opinion that infection was carried through abrasions on the skin and he suggested that the wearing of watertight boots and long sleeves by cane cutters and other field workers should be compulsory."

However there was some objection by the growers to this measure and there were those who contradicted the medical evidence. A strike by the cane cutters of the Herbert River Valley in 1934 resulted in an application by the A.W.U. to the industrial magistrate for an order for cane to be burned in both the Victoria and Macknade Mill areas:

"The Industrial Court today granted the application of the Australian Workers' Union for a continuance of the order under which, in association with the general campaign against Weil's disease, all cane in the Victoria and Macknade Mill areas must be burnt prior to being cut."

"Deficient Diet, Lack Of Vitamins." *Morning Bulletin*, Wednesday 20 March 1935, p.6 and "Burning of Cane. Order Court's Only Course. WEIL'S DISEASE PRECAUTION." *Queensland Times*, Saturday 20 July 1935, p.9.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

Dr Gordon Morrissey's distinctive Buick automobile features in the centre of this panel. His life-saving doctor's bag rests in front of the vehicle. To the left of the car are the gravestones of those cane cutters who have tragically died of Weil's disease. One of the gravestones is old and discoloured indicating that cane cutters had been dying of this disease for years before its cause was finally identified and a treatment found. A large rat, the bearer of the disease, climbs a cane stalk. To the right of the panel, cane cutters sit with downed knives. They wait, smoking, to learn the outcome of their strike. The grey tile at their feet evokes hard work and the steely resolution of the strikers. The deep twilight blue merging into a bright daylight sky represents the progress from the darkness of disease and excruciating death into the bright light of new medical diagnosis and treatment.

In 1925 the North Queensland branch of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) adopted a resolution that 75% of the employment in sugar growing areas should go to British workers. This resolution came to be known as 'British preference'.

British Preference

'British preference' reflected a concern that Italians would take available jobs away from British workers. In 1925 for instance, 610 men signed on as cutters and 79 as cooks. Of those, 85% were Italian and a good proportion of the remainder of other alien nationality. In that year the North Queensland branch of the AWU adopted a resolution that 75% of the employment in sugar growing areas should go to the British. Even with the formation of the British Preference League and the drawing up of a 'Gentlemen's Agreement' by a conference of sugar industry associations in 1930, which stipulated the enforcement of 75% British employment, it was agreed that 75% could not be enforced in the Herbert River Valley. An Ingham branch of the British Preference League began with the object of 22% British, aiming for an eventual total British control of cane industry work. While British preference did manage to secure most new cane cutting positions for British workers across the sugar growing areas, raising their number by 47% between the 1930 and 1934 seasons, it did not succeed to reduce the number of alien cane cutters. The farmers did not necessarily agree with the British preference clause arguing that it denied them the right of choosing what labour they liked and denied work to alien cutters who had proven their worth over preceding seasons:

"Farmers, in your own interest Sunday, January 8, you should vote against British Preference. Every farmer must be free to employ whom he likes. Who want Britishers, take Britishers. Who want foreigners, take them. Who want Maltese, take Maltese. Cane cutting work must be free to all workers who can do that work. Don't take any notice of nationality. British Preference is wrongful. It damages not only the foreigner but also the British born because it causes racial hatred and fighting."

Italian cane cutters were followed by men of other nationalities: Basque, Spanish, Balts, Maltese, Yugoslavs, Finns and others, who in their turn would experience similar discrimination. Fortunately, in time, their hard work and commitment saw them make an incalculable contribution to their new nation.

"Statement by Foreign Cutters' Defence Association." *Herbert River Express*, 10 January 1933, p.6.

Fields of cane harbour many animals, native and introduced: bandicoot, pheasant, rat, carpet snake and cane toad to name a few. Today the cane toad (Bufo marinus) is considered a pest, endangering local fauna as it hops onwards and outwards on a relentless invasion of the Australian landscape. It has few predators and defies any means employed to attempt to halt it. Remarkably some native wildlife have evolved to tolerate its poison.

The cane toad and cane fires

When the first consignment of the toad collected from the suburbs of Honolulu was released on 18 August 1935 in the Mulgrave and Hambledon sugar growing districts of North Queensland it was hailed as the saviour of the industry. The toad was said to be a predator of a native beetle which came to be known as the sugarcane beetle because the grubs of the beetle feed on the roots of sugar cane, weakening them, so that in wet weather the stalks lose their purchase on the soil and fall over to wither and die. While numerous attempts were made to control the beetle none had been successful and by the 1930s sugar cane farmers were desperate. The cane toad seemed to be an answer to a prayer:

"Delight that the giant toad, natural enemy of the destructive cane grub, took so kindly to the Queensland climate, has given place to disappointment amongst canegrowers, since the Direct-General of Health (Dr. Cumpston) has advised the Minister of Agriculture that no more must be liberated in the canefields. It is feared that they will eradicate insects of economic value. The toads were brought from Hawaii several months ago by an officer of the Department of Agriculture, who was especially despatched to Honolulu to study their habits. They were sent to the Sugar Experiment Station at Meringa, and bred so rapidly that numbers were soon available for liberation in the fields. "The toads are the best economic contribution to the sugar industry for many years, and I shall take up the matter with the Federal Government at once," said Mr. Bulcock. "Tests have proved that the toads will not be a menace to useful insect life."

"Giant Toads under Federal Ban. Short-lived Career in Canefields." *The Queenslander*, Thursday 28 November 1935, p.19.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

This panel is a powerful evocation of a cane field on fire. At ground level we see examples of native and introduced animals lurking amongst the stools of cane: bandicoot, pheasant, rat, carpet snake, owl and cane toad. As the fire roars through the paddock animals run for safety, and the leaf matter is burnt away leaving sooty, 'sterilized' sticks of cane. The cane cutters can now cut the cane free of the threat of contracting Weil's disease. The fire's destructive force represents a new beginning in the cane fields after the years of tyranny of Weil's disease.

The cane fires brought the novelty of cane ash or 'black snow'. While children jumped and played joyously as the black ash fell, their parents were more overjoyed by the civic progress evidenced by the opening of a Farmers' Building in Lannercost Street built to house the offices of the District Executive of the Queensland Cane Growers' Association (Q.C.G.A.) 1934. At the same time though, the community was being shaken by the activities of the Black Hand, a home grown extortion racket, feared to have associations with the Mafia.

The Farmers' Building and the Black Hand

The Queensland Cane Growers' Association (Q.C.G.A.), constituted under the Primary Producers' Organisation and Marketing Act of 1926 brought into existence the Cane Growers' Council and its component bodies, the Mill Suppliers' Associations District Executives, and the Mill Suppliers' Committee with its district branches. In 1927 two Mill Suppliers' committees and a District Executive were set up in the Herbert River Valley as a result of the formation of the Q.C.G.A. Meetings of the Q.C.G.A. were held in the Herbert River Farmers' League building, Lannercost Street. However within a short time it was considered that the status of the Q.C.G.A. demanded that it have a building of its own and as a result the Executive purchased in 1934, by public auction, a block of land in Lannercost Street and on September 29 of the same year the Farmers' Building was opened.

"An event of some moment to our organization and more especially to those of our members in the Herbert River district, was the opening of the Herbert River Farmers' Building, which took place in Ingham on Saturday, September 29.

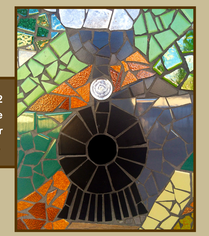
As chief executive officer of our organization and on the invitation of the District Cane-growers' Executive, I had the pleasure of performing the function of officially opening this fine building with its convenient and commodious premises, and took the opportunity, with Mr. Doherty, who was also present by invitation, to impress upon the large audience of farmers and others present the value of disciplined organization and co-operation within the ranks of cane-growers generally, together with the benefits financially and otherwise which must eventually accrue to them locally through the establishment of their own offices, trading activities, etc."

"CANE-GROWERS' COUNCIL. CHAIRMAN'S QUARTERLY REPORT. (Presented to Council Meeting December 10, 1934)." *The Cairns Post*, Saturday 15 December 1934.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

As the cane ash ('black snow') falls children jostle joyfully trying to catch it. The dog jumps up joining in on the fun. Birds swoop and weave above the smoke cloud eager to prey on animals running desperately to escape the cane fire. Nearby a cane cutter is hard at work cutting the burnt cane. In the distance is his home for the season, the primitive barracks with its lean-to kitchen. Behind it is the mango tree, a species of tree introduced for its shade and delectable fruit. The farmer's house is elevated on stumps to keep it out of the reach of flood waters and the miasmas that were believed to cause tropical fevers. Nearby is the farm shed and stables, for horses were still used in the paddocks until the Second World War. In town, Lannercost Street now has a new building: The Farmers' Building. A looming cloud over the scene represents the Black Hand, a home-bred extortion racket thought at the time as possibly having Mafia connections. Look for the black hand which was the symbol used to identify the origin of the extortion notes.

Of the 674 Italian-born residents living in the Herbert River Valley in 1921, 122 were farmers. A similar number were cane cutters. In the following years the Italian immigrants continued to be at the forefront of the expanding sugar industry and their migration was encouraged by the Queensland Government.



Italian migration in the 1920s and 1950s

In the 1920s the Queensland sugar industry was expanding, new land was being opened up and the Queensland Government was encouraging further Italian migration. In 1921 there were 1,838 Italian-born residents in Australia, 674 of those living in the Herbert River Valley. Though the British residents of the Valley still numbered 70% of the population the Italians dominated the sugar industry with about one in four sugar cane farmers being Italian and one in five cane cutters, Italian. In the next decade Italian farmers alone tripled from 122 to over 400 by 1930. This number would increase again in the 1950s when Italian immigration was again encouraged post World War II. The Italian Consul-General gave these reasons for their success:

"What are the reasons for the success of Italian emigration to Australia about which you hear so much talk, notwithstanding that it is still in embryo?

First. – Italian emigration to Australia is a natural, spontaneous, non-artificial movement.

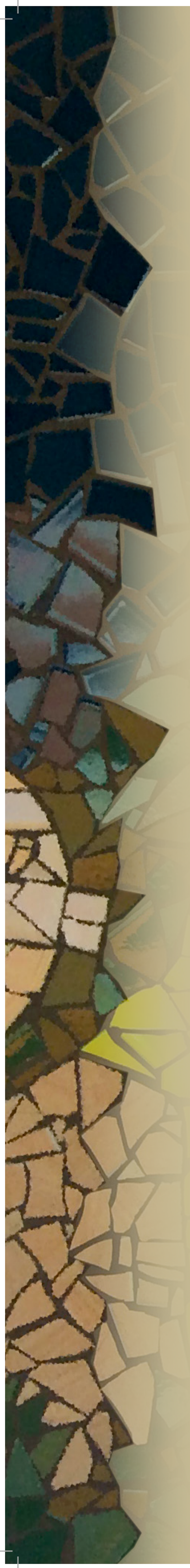
Second. – The Italians who migrate to Australia belong to the agricultural class.

Third. – They are moved by the pioneering spirit, and they come out with the earnest intention to work hard and make good."

Italian Consul-General Grossardi. *North Queensland Register*, 10 January 1927, p.98.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

The train steaming towards the viewer in the forefront of the panel is carrying new Italian migrants. They were keen to make a new life of hard work in the cane fields of the Herbert River Valley. The new cane cutting season was heralded by the sign-on when the farmer and his prospective gang would meet. Here we see the gang, all dressed neatly, having gathered at the picture theatre, town hall or mill to sign on. Afterwards they go to the pub, here the Seymour Hotel, to seal the contract with a pint or two. Behind the hotel the sun, reminiscent of Frederick McCubbin's painting *Setting Sun*, is setting in a blaze of final glory. Not only is the sun setting on a successful sign-on day but it hints that the sun is setting on the cane cutter way of life as farm work becomes mechanized. Trucks feature in this panel because the owning of a motorized vehicle by a farming family was a luxury and if one was purchased it would be a truck which could be used to carry both farm requirements and the new cane cutter gang to their barracks.



The post World War II period was a time of revitalization and advancement of the sugar industry as mechanization changed how farms were worked and signified the end of manual hand cutting.

Mechanization and the end of the horse-drawn era

This panel depicts how the post World War II period was a time when mechanization of the sugar industry changed not only how farms were worked and the cane cutters' routine, but also life on the farm. Central to these changes was the replacement of the horse-drawn equipment by mechanized machinery. Bush bard, Dan Sheahan wrote poignantly of these changes in his poem "Back to the Horse":

Where, oh, where are the horses now-
The blacks, the browns and the greys –
That pulled the harrows and the plough-
In hard pioneering days.
Old harness hanging on the wall
Tattered torn and twisted –
Save them we have no proof at all
That they have ever existed.

Came a time when the motor mob –
Upon the land descended –
The horse was left without a job –
Their long, long reign was ended,
There was naught to do but turn them bush
We weren't going to need them -

Dan Sheahan, "Back to the Horse." *Songs from the Canefields*, p.p.113-114.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

As stands of timber are depleted across the Valley no longer are farm house exteriors sheeted in timber but in the new wonder product, fibrolite. The creak of windmills is silenced as they are replaced by the whirr of petrol and electric pumps. Shed construction changes to accommodate tractors and larger farm implements as horses are put out to pasture and tractors replace horses. Hand planting is made a labour of the past as cutter planters appear, the burning of paddocks of cane becomes a Sunday evening routine, cane cutters rejoice as the hard job of laying the portable rail and shoulder loading is done away with by mechanical loaders. The scattering of tiles of varied, bright colours in this panel reflects the change and innovation afoot in all aspects of farming life. In contrast, vintage green and hard industrial grey colours represent the past with all its charms, despite the hard agricultural work.

Within twenty years of the end of World War II mechanization of the industry had largely been achieved. Never again did the annual clarion call have to go out across Queensland to "the hardiest and stoutest of her sons…To gather in the harvest" and "toil like heroes where creeks and rivers meet…."

The mechanical harvester and the demise of the manual cane cutter

Despite the reprieve given the sugar industry after World War II by the post-war mass immigration schemes which fed thousands of raw new chums into the steamy cane fields of north Queensland, it was clear that a mechanization of the harvesting process was imperative if the industry was to survive. The seasonal nature of the cane harvesting with its annual cycle of closure in the slack and recommencement in the season meant that the sugar industry ***"was more amenable to the introduction of new methods and technologies than in occupations continuing through the year. The canecutters themselves took their fate surprisingly calmly…"***

In 1960 the Herbert River Canegrowers' Association established the Herbert River Mechanical Harvesting Committee to investigate the performance of mechanical harvesters in the Herbert. At the forefront of the development of a viable mechanical harvester were local brothers, Laurence and Joe Mizzi. Though the Herbert River Valley was one of the last bastions of manual harvesting as it turned out, it nevertheless claimed in 1965 to be the first district to harvest over one million tons mechanically. This meant that only three hundred cutters were contracted in the Herbert in that year, barely 25 percent of the numbers five years earlier. In 1967 cane ceased to be harvested by hand altogether in the Herbert except for that required for planting. It was not until December 1977 however, that all reference to manual cane cutters was deleted from the Sugar Industry Award.

Dan Sheahan, "The Cane Harvest." *Songs from the Canefields*, p.p.116-117.

Geoff Burrows and Clive Morton, *The Canecutters*, p.242.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

Again we see vintage green tiles giving away to colourful tiles signifying innovation and change. A MF515 harvester with a man raking the cane out of the chute, as once was a necessary but dangerous part of the process, is watched by farmers and industrial representatives. Some are hopeful, some are sceptical, as can be seen from their stances. The cane cutters have downed their knives. They are disheartened, filled with uncertainty. One takes a swig from his water bag, another sharpens his cane knife, perhaps belligerently? Even the dog with his tail hanging down wears a disheartened look.

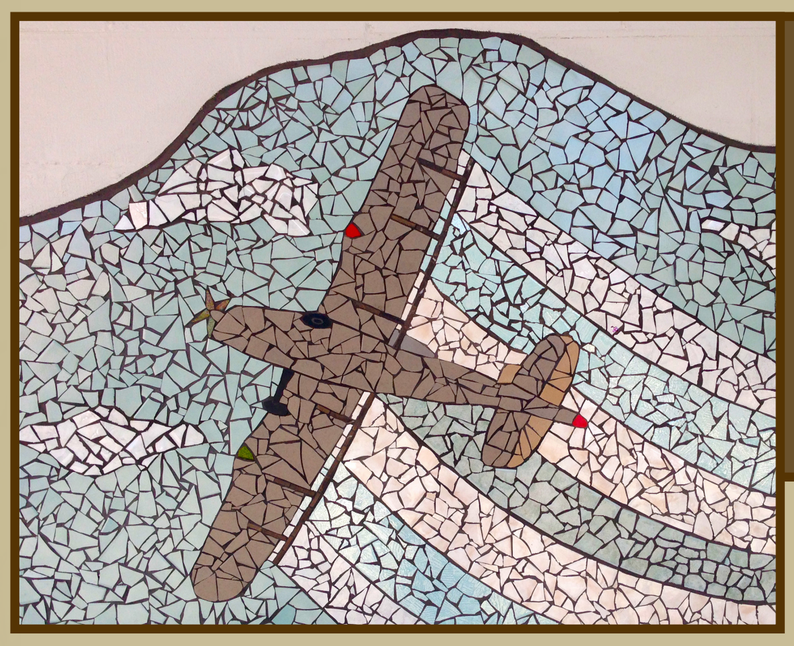
Only one ‘sky-scraper’ graces the Ingham skyline and not surprisingly in a district whose principal crop is sugar cane, the building is the Canegrowers’ Building.

The Canegrowers’ Building

Ingham’s “sky-scraper”, the Canegrowers’ Building, was an exciting addition to the skyline of the town when it was opened by John Row, MLA on December 12, 1970. It replaced the wooden building built only 40 years earlier. The novelty of the view over the bustling town of Ingham, available to the public from the top of the tall building, lasted for many years.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

The Canegrowers’ Building stands tall in this panel with its upper reaches high in the clouds. The building represents all that has come to be since Land Commissioner George Elphinstone Dalrymple broke through the undergrowth on the Seaview Range on that long ago day in 1864.



Organizations such as the representative bodies like the Herbert River Farmers’ League, legislative ones like Queensland Canegrowers’ Association (QCGA) and advisory bodies like Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations (BSES) whose work has now been assumed by HCPSL (Herbert Cane Productivity Services Limited) were vital vehicles which assisted growers to be knowledgeable and progressive agriculturalists and unified in order to realize common goals.

New technologies to combat pests and diseases

On September 29 1934 the Herbert River Canegrowers’ building was opened in Lannercost Street and in 1953 the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations (BSES) came to Ingham. Through these and the earlier Herbert River Farmers’ League, farmers were assisted to be knowledgeable and progressive agriculturalists and unified in order to realize common goals. As A.W. Carr put it many years before, organizations of their own gave farmers a: ***“bureau through which the farmers could communicate with the Government or others on any matter of common interest.”***

In the 1950s farmers were encouraged to take advantage of the newest technologies and means to combat pests and diseases. These technologies included the chemical control of weeds and pests, one of which was aerial spraying which first came into widespread use in the early 1950s. It requires impressive aerobatic skill to deliver the chemical spray on the correct field at precisely the correct moment and the history of chemical spraying in the Herbert River Valley has not been one without incident and injury.

“Early History.” *Herbert River Express*, 24 January 1933.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel the aerial spray plane soars and swoops before the viewers’ eyes. Here the industry is taking flight on the wings of modern, labour-saving ways of handling pests and diseases. Look carefully in the stool of cane and find the numerous pests and diseases that are the bane of the cane farmer’s life: pigs, cane grubs and beetles, smut, and yellow canopy syndrome. In the foreground of the panel is a patchwork of paddocks stretching to the blue mountains of the Great Dividing Range in the background. The flow of paddocks as far as the eye can see is synonymous with the flow-on effect of an innovative sugar industry to the progress and prosperity of the Herbert River Valley.

In a rural community the highlights of the social calendar are the Show, the local festival and the annual horse race meeting. In the Herbert River Valley the Herbert River Pastoral and Agricultural Society, the Maraka Committee and the Herbert River Jockey Club faithfully ensure that these events are bigger and better than the last.

Horse racing, Maraka and the Herbert River Pastoral and Agricultural Society

Horse races, festivals and the annual Show were once rare opportunities in the days when selections were first being cleared and homesteads established, to get together as a community and take a rest from the hard back-breaking and tedious life that frontier life was.

Consequent to the formation of the Herbert River Jockey Club in July 1879, the first annual horse race meeting was held two months later on September 19. It was reported that ***"Lovely weather favoured the club, and it was taken advantage of by all excepting the sugar people (whose time just now is fully occupied), a good muster being the result. The stewards, secretary, and various officials have to be congratulated and highly complimented on the very efficient manner in which all matters connected with the meeting were carried out. The ball opened with the Maiden Plate, for which six horses came to the post. It was won very cleverly by Harkaway, a horse with a good dash of foot, combined with good staying powers."***

In 1959, to mark the centenary of the creation of Queensland as a state in 1859, a Herbert Street Park Mardi Gras was held. This Mardi Gras evolved into the Maraka Festival. Maraka, an indigenous word, means 'pleasant evening or happy get together'. The Maraka Logo came about in 1964 as the result of a public competition and incorporates the allamanda flower, the Hinchinbrook floral emblem. The responsibility of that first Festival was assumed by the two service clubs already operating, the Ingham Rotary Club and the Ingham Apex Club though many more service clubs participate today.

The Herbert River Pastoral and Agricultural Show was first held in 1883. It provided an opportunity for residents to get together to show off their produce and livestock, their cooking and sewing skills, and to share vital information about newly available machinery and farming methods. The first Valley shows were probably not terribly auspicious events if Ellis Rowan's description of a local show is anything to go by. She says that it was ***"amusing, the latter consisting of a small stall of unripe-looking fruit, a bag of sugar from Macnade [sic] (there were no others to compete, so it won the prize of £3), a pen of fowls, a bull-dog tied to a post, looking like any kind of mongrel, a half-bred Newfoundland, three bunches of wild flowers, and a dozen samples of school children's work. The stand was filled mostly with children, eating buns and other sticky delicacies, and the mothers were nursing their babies in most delightful unconcern."***

The Brisbane Courier, 15 Wednesday October 1879, p.6.
M.E.A. Rowan, *Flower Hunter in Queensland and New Zealand*, p.p.25-26.

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel a deep night sky is lit up by the magic of fireworks, a noisy spectacle of every Maraka. Herbert River Pastoral and Agricultural Society stewards have judged the sugar cane exhibit and stand next to the ribboned winning stools of cane. The ferris wheel hints at the tempting delights of side show alley and the rides. A grandstand full of eager spectators cheer on their favourite horse as it strains for the finish line.

The Herbert River Valley is dominated by a water course, the Herbert River, which when in flood becomes a raging torrent taking everything in its path. The occurrence of major floods and cyclones, such as Cyclone Yasi of 2011 with their toll of destruction and even loss of life are anticipated fearfully each wet season.

Cyclones and Floods

Cyclone Yasi, described as the ***"most catastrophic storm to ever hit our coast"***, crossed the North Queensland coast with all the destructive force of a category 5 cyclone deep in the witching hours of Wednesday 2 and Thursday 3 February with Tully and Cardwell in its direct and relentless course. Even though Ingham was not in the direct path, Hawkins Creek and Abergowrie, southwest of Cardwell, experienced the brunt of the cyclone with devastating result. The Valley was consequently designated a disaster area.

Another significant disaster was the flood of 1927, when 23 people died, and 2,500 cattle and 1,500 horses were lost.

Today, although the region still suffers from nature's onslaught, fortunately there is very little loss of life thanks to excellent communications and preparatory measures.

Premier Anna Bligh at ABC News "Cyclone to bring '24 hours of terror'." http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/02/02/3127394.htm

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

Each flood and each cyclone leave a deep scar on the community psyche. The year of each event is recalled. The swirl and whirl of tiles in this panel depicting Cyclone Yasi gives the viewer some sense of the destructive, chaotic, frightening force that is a cyclone. Cyclone Yasi is a sobering reminder that nature in the end is the great leveller, and all human endeavours, in the face of nature at its most forceful, are but bits of stick on the wind.

Sugar farming in the 21st century in the Herbert River Valley is a big and sophisticated business in every way, from the size of land holdings to the amount of fertiliser and diesel required, to the facilities available to the farmer to ensure best farming practice: yield mapping and GPS (Global Positioning Systems).

Sugar Farming for the 21st century

The Queensland sugar cane farm can be between 100 hectares to in excess of 1,000 hectares in size. The average Herbert River farm is in excess of 50 hectares. Today a farm of 50 hectares or less does not afford a living and as a result small family sugar farming is becoming untenable. Those farmers surviving are the large family concerns conducted by several family members growing cane on several properties in various parts of the district, supplementing their farm income with sugar harvesting or planting contracts or an off-farm income stream. Some farmers wanting to exit the industry sold their land to Managed Investment Scheme (MIS) Companies which bought up former cane and cattle land for the planting of eucalypts, and tropical hardwoods. Consequently described as ***"an environmental disaster"*** most of these stand abandoned or have reverted to cane land, due to the collapse of the MIS Companies.Sugar farmers today need to run sophisticated businesses and there are facilities available to ensure that they can, from bulk fertiliser and diesel deliveries to yield mapping and GPS (Global Positioning Systems) and laser levelling.

The Herbert River Express, 14 September 2004, quoting Terry Mackenroth MP (then Treasurer and Deputy Premier).

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel the truck delivering bulk fertiliser dominates the landscape, indicative of the size of today's farming operations. Similarly, the tractor drawing its large disc harrows through fertile brown soil leaps from the panel. In the centre of the panel the viewer can see that laser levelling is being carried out contouring the land for best moisture retention and dispersal. To the left is a MIS tree plantation, promising hope but failing dismally. To the right a colourful layout of tiles represents yield mapping. In the foreground is a little farming family standing next to their trusty farm ute parked near the diesel tank. The ever faithful farm dog is on the back. In the shed can be seen the tractors, fertiliser bags and the tinny for fishing in the plentiful and healthy waterways of the Valley.

The burning of cane was once considered vital for the safety of manual cane cutters but with the introduction of mechanical harvesting cane could be harvested without burning (green cane harvesting). Bigger crops have impelled harvester operators to cut and transport increased tonnages. This has resulted in new handling equipment such as the tipper elevator units.

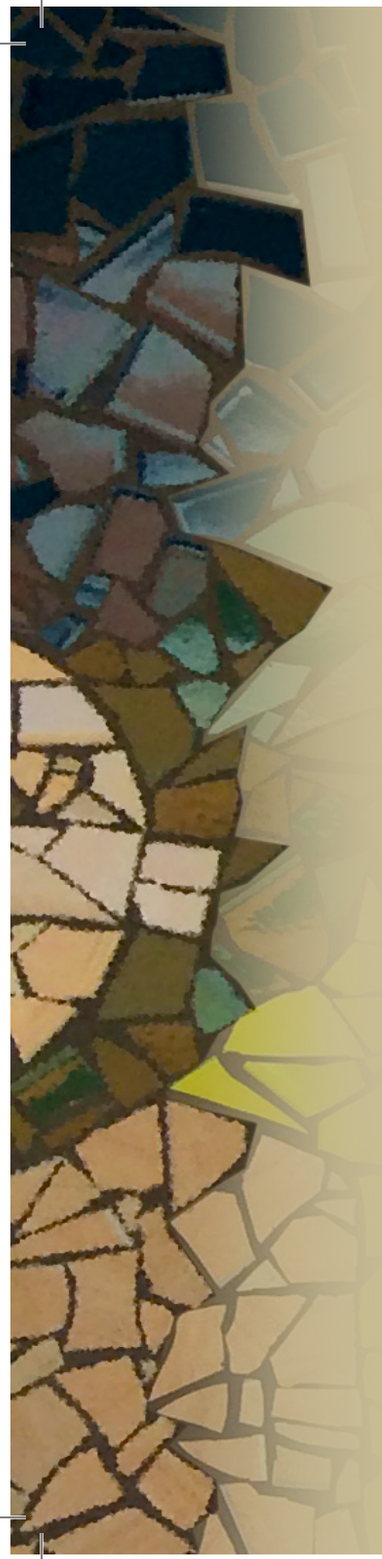
Green cane harvesting and bulk handling

The Herbert River Valley has produced many innovators and inventors. One, Tony Carta, invented the large tipper elevator haul-out device that now takes the harvested cane from the fields. The cane is cut green (green cane harvesting) and the remaining stools of cane are covered with the 'trash blanket', leaves and other residue left after harvesting. The trash blanket acts as mulch and assists in the plant's regrowth. Formerly the trash was disked in. Trash blanketing permits ratoons of up to six years and reduces tillage which can degrade the soil. Once the cane is harvested it is hauled by cane trains to Victoria and Macknade Mills now owned by Wilmar Sugar Australia Limited. The cane is crushed and the resultant sugar is taken in bins to the bulk sugar terminal at Lucinda where it is loaded on sugar container ships destined for all reaches of the world. Wilmar describes itself as: ***"Australia's leading sugar and renewable energy company. We are Australia's largest raw sugar producer and one of the top 10 producers in the world".*** Wilmar is showing its confidence in the local sugar industry by not only conducting the milling enterprises but buying up land for sugar growing in the Valley.

WILMAR https://www.wilmarsugarmills.com/

ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In this panel a harvester cuts a tall stand of cane. Tipper elevator haul-out tractors receive the cane while another filled with harvested cane heads for the railway line. Opportunistic birds wait for insects and worms which they grab with their greedy beaks. The haul-out heads for the railway line just as a train pulls away with bins filled with harvested cane. Another tractor pulls a fertiliser box, using the fertiliser that has been delivered in bulk to the farm. The mill mud truck spreads a load of this by-product from the mill, used by farmers as a fertiliser. In the foreground Wilmar workers dressed in their distinctive safety uniform, stand in front of a tarpaulin-covered mountain of bagasse, ready for a long, tiring season. The mill steams on under a starry sky, for crushing is a 24 hour business. As the sun rises bins full of milled sugar head to Lucinda to the bulk terminal where it will be conveyed on the 5.76 kilometre conveyer belt and loaded on ships destined for faraway ports as illustrated by the tiled map of the world. The smoke of the chimneys flowing towards the remaining panels and the sun rising indicate that a progressive new era is hoped for.



ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION

In an earlier panel the path of the Rainbow Serpent came to an abrupt end, symbolising the dispossession and dispersal of the Indigenous people. It reappears briefly in the War panel, recognising our Indigenous soldiers. Now however it has returned, slithering in all its sleek strength along the bottom of the panel and on into the panels that acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the achievement of this mosaic installation. It reminds the viewer that the land is a gift to treasure in our lifetime and our duty is to be wise custodians and to endeavour to live in harmony together, ever respectful of the original inhabitants of this Valley who continue to have a deep spiritual connection with the land.

Workshop Participants

Many groups, along with many individuals, joined in to learn how to mosaic and assist with the construction of this installation.

We were able to simply walk in off the street and were seated comfortably at a table which had an image overlaid with plastic and mosaic mesh and were taught how to mosaic using the crazy pave technique (which was just like doing a jig-saw puzzle). Soon after we were given the option to advance onto learning how to hand cut tiles using tile nippers and most of us took up the challenge.

We were given coloured tiles that we had to glue onto the mosaic mesh. Laying the tiles was a very satisfying and therapeutic activity that had many of us hooked and returning often to new found friends, smiling faces, the sound of chatter and laughter around the tables to finish off “our piece.”

We remember which parts of the mosaic we worked on, each with a story of its own. Many of us could relate to those stories well, as we, or our ancestors, were once the characters portrayed in the mosaic. Some of us still remain in the sugar industry so we were able to relate to the present day scenes.

Community confidence grew as a result of the workshops as some of us are now starting our own home mosaic projects with our newly learned skills. We really enjoyed being a part of this project and are proud to say that Ingham is now wealthier in community spirit. Within the mosaic is a little part of us, and the friendships and memories formed will always stay strong within our minds and hearts.

Tradesmen

Back: Jarad Venables, David Venables, Lindsay Blanco, Richard Peeke, Sam Spina, David Poppi & Darren Richardson

Front: Kye Spina, Brett Parsons, Daryl Douglas & Peter Ryan

Absent: Michael Bartolini

For many local tradesmen from throughout the district it was an honour and a privilege to be involved in such a fantastic community project as the Mercer Lane Project.

From preparing the wall with render, hanging completed mosaic panels, assisting with grouting, to replacing the downpipes depicting the sugarcane varieties, we are pleased to know that we have made the job for Kate and her team that little bit easier. To now see this tribute to the history of the sugar industry complete makes us all proud to have been a part of such a worthwhile endeavour.

With our backgrounds in the building industry, ranging from Carpenters and Concreters to Glaziers and Plumbers, many afternoons spent on the wall could be described as, and we're sure Kate and the ladies would agree, quite colourful!

We would sincerely like to thank, and also congratulate Kate and Karen for the opportunity they gave us to participate, and for their vision for this project. It certainly makes us all proud to be part of this community. Well done to all involved.

Cassady St Mosaic Artists

Helen Digger, Lorraine Venables, Kate Carr, Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui, Pauline Jayasuria, Jo-Anne Spina, Alison Zatta, Lynette Buonaccorso

Having created many smaller mosaic pieces along with our debut large scale community public art piece “The Iconography of the Herbert River Valley” (located at the front of the Hinchinbrook Shire Council building in Lannercost Street), our small team of mosaic artists worked on the finer hand cut details of the mosaic during the construction phase. Along with the workshop assistants, we also assisted with the installation and grouting of the mosaic and passed on our valuable skills to train workshop participants on tile tool cutting techniques and procedure on how to mosaic using the crazy pave technique.

Workshop Assistants

Helen Digger & Tania Aitken

As workshop assistants we busily broke hundreds of tiles into thousands of pieces for this project; we welcomed and trained many participants on mosaic making and we also assisted in the construction of the mosaic and helped the artist to facilitate the walk-in workshops.

The Mercer Lane Mosaic Project extended our mosaic skills and experience to a new level. Working as part of a team gave us a sense of togetherness, sharing camaraderie and new friendships along the way.

We are all very proud to have been a part of this amazing project that tells our local story for the Shire of Hinchinbrook and hope to do more community public art in the future.

HISTORIAN

Bianka Vidonja Balanzategui

I am a sugar industry and migration historian and a published author of works such as ***Gentlemen of the Flashing Blade and The Herbert River Story.*** I am currently enrolled at James Cook University in a post-graduate degree of Doctor of Philosophy, History. I am the daughter of a Displaced Person cane cutter. His stories and those of my mother, whose paternal ancestry was Anglo-Indian, told by the light of a kerosene lamp, fired my imagination and shaped my ambition to become not only an historian, but a story teller.

I came to live at Stone River when I married Mark Balanzategui who comes from a sugar farming family of Spanish Basque origin. We have five children, none of whom have chosen the farming life. All, however, return frequently to the little farmhouse on the riverbank to enjoy the tranquillity and rest at home on the farm. I was both an artist and the Consultant Historian for this mosaic installation and am proud to have been associated with this magnificent portrayal of the story of the sugar cane industry of the Herbert River Valley.

CONCEPT BY

Karen Venables

Together with my husband Jarad, we are the owners of two businesses in Ingham, JS & KA Venables Plumbing and Draining and JK's Delicatessen. Last year I attended an Economic Development Workshop in Ingham which ignited a passion that had been flickering inside me for some time. Two years prior to this, my family and I had travelled to Tasmania on a wonderful holiday, to a little town called Sheffield which will always stay in my thoughts. It was only a small town but it was buzzing with tourists admiring the beautiful public art.

Returning to Ingham I had this thought - how do we get Ingham buzzing with tourists? We have wonderful natural attractions here, but are they enough and does anyone know about them? That economic development meeting helped spark my imagination. What better way to get tourists to our town. Let's tell them our story, our history, what the Herbert River district was built upon.

I grew up at Hawkins Creek on a cane farm, driving old utes around the headlands, getting covered in "black snow" after the cane fires, and getting itchy from "Hairy Mary" in the cane. I spent many years driving my Nonno up and down the cane drills, checking the cane. So I felt I had to tell the story of the cane cutters and the sugar industry. Now when I look at this mosaic I shed a few tears, being so proud of this great industry I was so fortunate to be born into.

ARTIST

Kate Carr

I am a local artist who has a passion for community public art. My husband David and I are fourth generation cane farmers who both grew up on family farms. We have three children, Hannah, Lachlan and Rachel who have been raised enjoying the lifestyle of the family cane farm near Cordelia.

I was the project manager of the Mercer Lane Mosaic project; I designed the images and facilitated the Community Mosaic Workshops.

I had two goals for this project. Firstly, to visually transform the historian's culturally rich story of the local sugar cane industry and canecutters into a portrayal of events, within a sliver of time, whilst depicting the essence of society and lives of everyday people who were instrumental in creating and building the industry to where it stands today. Secondly, to engage people through experience to become immersed within art, culture and history, to become the beneficiaries of the many amazing outcomes that these three facets woven into the fabric of society produce.

This large scale community public art project has immeasurable significance for the past, present and future generations and I am elated to have played a part in it.